

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2011-66

Friday, June 3, 2011

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Evers statement: Committee expands vouchers while cutting public school funding

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers issued a statement on the actions of the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance to expand vouchers for private schools while making catastrophic cuts in funding for public schools.

“This week I urged the members of the Joint Committee on Finance to restore funding for public schools and work collaboratively to improve the quality of *all* Milwaukee schools before considering any voucher expansion. Given this year’s Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) results and other studies that show voucher students score similarly or worse than their counterparts in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), our efforts should now focus on all of the children in Milwaukee, regardless of what kind of school they attend — public, choice, or independent charter.

“Instead, a majority of the committee voted to expand vouchers to private schools in the Racine Unified School District and make private schools outside the city of Milwaukee eligible to take Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) students. The committee has also taken the program away from its focus on children in poverty by expanding the wealth criteria for participation.

“Specifically, for Racine’s citizens and 21,000 public school students, the actions by the Joint Committee on Finance mean a loss of \$1.9 million in school aids over the next two years to pay for these vouchers to private schools, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB). This is on top of the \$11 million in school aids Racine loses in 2011-12 according to the LFB. And, at the same time, this state budget cuts \$40 million for Racine’s public schools over the next two years in reduced revenue limits compared to current law. The bottom line is less funding for the education of Racine public school students and higher local property taxes.

“This expansion of public funding for private education comes without a single public hearing in Racine, or elsewhere, or time for public debate on a specific legislative proposal. It also comes at the same time that the 2011-13 state budget makes unprecedented cuts in funding for public schools. To put this into perspective, the

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5 percent cut to revenue limits results in over \$1.6 billion less funding for public schools statewide in the next two years compared to current law. This will impact the classrooms and educational opportunities of 872,000 students, while funding for school choice is increased by millions and the voucher payment receives no reduction at all.

“For the past 10 years, I have worked with legislators and community leaders to improve the accountability and transparency of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. I am glad that the requirement remains that all students receiving vouchers take the same test as public school students, which for now is the WKCE. This is vital transparency for taxpayer funding and for parents to make informed choices.”

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_66.pdf.